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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 003154

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DEPT FOR D, P, EAP, EAP/PMBS, EAP/PD, INR/EAP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [MOPS](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: "MAKE THE SUPREME SACRIFICE"

REF: A. OPS CENTER - MANILA 07-08-05 TELECON

[B](#). MANILA 3139

[C](#). MANILA 3133

Classified By: Political Officer Andrew McClearn for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The chorus has grown for President Arroyo to step down. Former president Corazon Aquino held a press conference late July 8 and called on President Arroyo "to make the supreme sacrifice" and resign. Several members of her former cabinet also called for her resignation on July 8, as did Senate President Franklin Drilon, who was speaking for the majority of the Liberal Party (LP), and the influential Makati Business Club. Some members of her former cabinet went on TV in her defense, as did the Speaker of the House. Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief Abu has pledged that the military will not intervene, and that it will uphold the law and the Constitution. Charge went on a TV news show on July 8 to underscore the USG's full support for the rule of law, and he opposed any possible extra-constitutional or extra-legal moves. End Summary.

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The Pressure Grows  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The chorus has grown for President Arroyo to step down. As foretold to Charge by former finance secretary Purisima earlier (ref B), former president Corazon Aquino held a press conference late July 8 and called on President Arroyo voluntarily and peacefully to give up her post. Aquino said she had visited Arroyo on July 7 and asked her "to make the supreme sacrifice" and quit, and to do it "as soon as possible." Aquino asserted that governmental institutions had become paralyzed, and that "good governance has become an impossible undertaking." Aquino suggested there were two options for the President to take: the first, for Arroyo voluntarily to resign and let Vice President Noli de Castro assume the presidency, according to the Constitution; and the second, for Arroyo to face impeachment and provoke a long and drawn out period of political sparring that would ultimately weaken Filipino democracy.

[1](#)3. (U) Six former Cabinet Secretaries and four other high officials separately called on President Arroyo to resign during a July 8 press conference. (Note: Per ref C, Arroyo had asked for all members of her Cabinet, to submit their resignations. End Note.) Together, the ten officials had formed the nucleus in Arroyo's Cabinet to implement economic reforms and basic social service programs. The ten members of this group were:

- Cesar Purisima (Secretary of Finance);
- Juan Santos (Secretary of Trade and Industry);
- Emilia Boncodin (Secretary of Budget Management);
- Guillermo Parayno (Commissioner, Bureau of Internal Revenue);
- Alberto Lina (Commissioner, Bureau of Customs);
- Teresita "Ging" Deles (Secretary, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process);
- Corazon "Dinky" Soliman (Secretary of Social Welfare and Development);
- Florencio "Butch" Abad (Secretary of Education);
- Rene Villa (Secretary of Agrarian Reform); and,
- Imelda Nicolas (Secretary, National Anti-Poverty Commission).

[1](#)4. (U) In a signed statement issued at the event, the ten noted that they would support the ascension to the presidency of Vice President De Castro after Arroyo resigned. They claimed they were not judging the President regarding her involvement in the recent scandals, yet they claimed that if she stayed in power the country would suffer, stating: "The longer the President stays in office under a cloud of doubt and mistrust...the greater the damage to the economy and the more vulnerable the fragile political situation becomes to extremists seeking to undermine our democratic life." The ten former officials immediately left the press conference without entertaining questions.

[1](#)5. (U) Arroyo also lost the support of important allies of her administration throughout July 8. Senate President and

LP President Franklin Drilon, long a staunch ally of the Arroyo administration, announced July 8 that the majority of the LP wants Arroyo to resign. In an earlier vote among party members, 20 had voted for her resignation (including Drilon), 11 voted to pursue Arroyo's impeachment as opposed to her resignation, one asked her to go on a leave of absence, and one voted to continue supporting Arroyo. Meanwhile, the Makati Business Club (MBC), a longtime supporter of Arroyo, also called on her resign. A July 8 statement signed by the influential group's chairman and president stated: "It is with a heavy heart that we ask the President to relinquish her position...for the sake of the commonwealth, for the sake of national unity, and for the sake of moving forward."

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Malacanang's Defenders  
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16. (U) Some members of her former Cabinet went on TV in her defense on July 8. Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes rallied behind Arroyo in a midday press conference. Ermita insisted there was no basis for the claim that Arroyo lacked the leadership and capacity to govern. In response to media questions about the damaging resignations by the majority of the members of Arroyo's core economic team, Secretary Romulo Neri of the National Economic Development Agency (NEDA) said that reforms would continue and belittled Purisima for his decision to attack the President. Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz attended the briefing, but did not speak.

17. (U) Speaker of the House Joseph de Venecia also stated that he did not think Arroyo's resignation was necessary. He said it was important, however, that Arroyo move promptly to sponsor the holding of a "Constituent Assembly" that would create a parliamentary-type system. Pro-administration lawmakers from the House of Representatives also held a press conference in which they underscored their support for the Arroyo administration. The legislators urged Arroyo to stand firm and welcome "new blood to be injected into the cabinet." Prominent leaders at the event included Arroyo stalwarts such as Rep. Prospero "Butch" Pichay, Rep. Ronaldo Puno, and Rep. Marcelo Libanan.

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Military Pledges Not to Interfere  
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18. (U) On July 8, AFP Chief of Staff General Efren Abu issued a widely publicized directive entitled "Conduct of the Armed Forces" to all "Major Service Commanders, Unified Commanders, Commanding Generals, Commanding Officers, and AFP support units." Abu said the ongoing appeals for Arroyo's resignation are part of a political and constitutional and legal process, and it is the AFP's duty to ensure freedom of expression and not interfere in that process. Any AFP intervention would "betray the trust given to (it) by the State and would certainly put (its) understanding of military professionalism in the eyes of the world in doubt," he declared in the directive. Abu also appealed for the AFP to "reestablish the noble tradition of military professionalism by insulating our officers and men from politics," and for all commanders to "act swiftly against any behavior that challenges or breaks away from the chain of command."

19. (C) As of late July 8, the Philippine National Police (PNP) is on high alert. Director Vidal Querol, chief of the PNP's National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO), told the media the alert is a standard move to keep the peace and maintain order. Legatt reports that NCRPO, other local PNP commands, and the National Bureau of Investigation have confirmed they will support the rule of law and will remain neutral as the situation unfolds. The AFP is likely to follow suit by increasing its own alert status, which also is not unusual. Military contacts report no extraordinary troop movements. There are several rallies taking place in Manila on July 8, but no reports of violence.

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Mission Reaction  
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10. (SBU) Charge gave a TV news interview on July 8 and underscored the USG's full support for accountability and the rule of law, and opposed any possible extra-constitutional or extra-legal moves. He encouraged Filipino leaders from all sides to focus on the "welfare of the Filipino people," and reassured the audience that the USG would assist this process "by ensuring and insisting on the rule of law and democratic processes." Charge stated USG opposition to a new round of "people power." He also expressed disappointment over the obligatory Cabinet resignations demanded by Arroyo on July 7, noting that it would likely disrupt important reforms underway, especially recent progress made towards economic modernization and the fight against corruption. Charge

described several of the recently resigned Cabinet Secretaries as "patriots, good and decent people," whose

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competence was highly respected in the international community, and whose loss will be a blow to the Arroyo administration and the GRP.

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Comment  
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11. (C) The pressure on Arroyo is growing. Aquino and her former Cabinet members' demands on Arroyo to resign was a real blow. Aquino is highly respected in Catholic and civil society circles. Purisima and his group command respect in many sectors of Philippine life and their attacks will resonate. The Makati Business Club is also highly influential and its decision to turn against her is very damaging. If the Catholic Church bishops, who are having their annual meeting this weekend, come out and ask for her resignation, Arroyo will be in even more serious political trouble. Abu's directive was a welcome step and should provide some ballast to a volatile situation. The good news is that events at this point are moving forward in a legal and constitutional manner. Mission continues to underscore the need for full adherence to the rule of law and to make clear our total opposition to any extra-constitutional or extra-legal moves.

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